

'KAZU merger will keep pulse on local news'

By Sam Farr, Member of Congress

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In the world of cliches, a real estate agent's "location, location, location" may be tossed around more than any other chestnut out there. But that worn out maxim applies to more than just home sales; it's also relevant to the media we read, watch and listen to. The various media we consume--paper, radio or television--are best when they're produced by and for residents of a community.

When you buy a new home, you probably prefer that it be close to work, shopping and entertainment. News outlets work in much the same way: individuals will be more likely to consume media, and they'll definitely be best-served by its content, if locals are intimately involved with the operation. They should be living, playing and working in the communities they cover.

This is one reason I'm so concerned about recent news that Pacific Grove's KAZU public radio station may leave local control.

Signals from KAZU and KUSP, the public radio station in Santa Cruz, cover the same ground and broadcast many of the same programs. It seems logical that an arrangement could be worked out where the two stations pool resources, divvy up programs and collaborate to serve their communities.

Luckily, just such a plan is in the pipeline, although there have been some bumps in the negotiation process. It's my hope that CSUMB will decide to keep KAZU local and enter into an agreement with KUSP that will benefit the entire Monterey Bay Peninsula. Establishing a system by which KAZU and Santa Cruz's KUSP can expand local news coverage is a win-win proposition for everyone.

KAZU and KUSP serve important roles as providers of news and public services. Over the

past few years, we've seen an alarming trend of contraction among our local media outlets. Newspapers in particular have lost reporters and editors, limiting the role they can play as local watchdog. We must make sure we don't lose more.

My constituents know that I've lived on the Central Coast my entire life, serving as county supervisor, state assemblyman and now as a member of Congress. And in my 30 years representing our region, I've seen media outlets come and I've seen them go. But never have I been so concerned that we're at a tipping point, a time when our media may not be able to fulfill their mission as watchdog.

There are other reasons that a joint operation makes sense. Fundraising is always a tough slog for public radio stations, and a larger station from elsewhere in the state could easily siphon off funds from our area. And if KAZU were turned into a simple pass-through for an outside station, it's not beyond imagination that staff members could lose their jobs.

Take all of these factors into account and the best option is clearly a locally operated KAZU. That result would best serve the interests of CSUMB and KUSP, it would ensure that our local news media hold onto an important player in the region, and it would be the best possible result for our community.